

## **A Sustainable LEADER Programme 2023-2027**

### **Submission on behalf of SECAD Partnership CLG**

SECAD Partnership CLG welcome the opportunity to make this submission as part of the CAP Strategic Plan. SECAD is a Local Development Company that has delivered LEADER since 1995.

The LEADER Programme is a key rural development tool for supporting the economic, social and environmental development of rural communities, by providing the resources necessary for rural communities to support their own development and create capacity at local level. For thirty years the LEADER Programme, delivered by Local Development Companies has maximised the drawdown and impact of EU funds, to create jobs in rural areas, and develop rural communities in keeping with the LEADER approach and evaluated as very successful by EU institutions.

The aim of the LEADER Programme 2023-2027 as identified in the draft CAP Strategic Plan is to continue to support a community led local development (CLLD) approach to rural development by animating and funding initiatives that emerge at a local level to address local challenges and needs.

Ireland's CAP SWOT analysis and Needs Assessment identified several challenges in rural Ireland for which the LEADER approach can assist with the delivery of Government objectives. These include the need to support private enterprises and communities to improve quality of life and economic activity in rural areas; and the need to create and sustain employment in rural Ireland with a focus on social inclusion and climate change mitigation.

Representing 1.8% of Ireland's total CAP Budget, an indicative Budget of €180 million has been allocated for LEADER 2023-2027. The Budget for the 2007-2013 Programme stood at €425 million (€85 million annual average) with the successor Programme that operated from mid-2016 to 2020 reduced to €250 million (€50 million annual average).

A further cut to €180 million is now proposed for the LEADER Programme 2023-2027 (€36 million annual average), and when examined on a year-by-year actual basis marks another significant reduction of almost 40% (not allowing for the effect of inflation in real terms) in the

funds available for the delivery of important rural enterprise, tourism, job creation, and community-led projects the length and breadth of the country.

***SECAD Partnership along with other Local Development Companies calls for the allocation of a sustainable minimum of €389 million (€77.8 million annual average) for the LEADER Programme 2023-2027 to drive 'bottom-up, community-led' investment to create and maintain enterprise in rural Ireland, to enhance the rural environment and support climate change mitigation initiatives in rural communities, as well as the identified high level ambitions of LEADER 2023-2027 outlined in the draft CAP strategic plan.***

***SECAD Partnership also calls for flexibility within the Irish LEADER programme to allow the use of the full range of mechanisms and supports as outlined and allowed for within the European Regulation.***

### **About Local Development Companies**

Local Development Companies are active in every County, City, and Parish in Ireland delivering integrated community, enterprise and social services based on the bottom-up community-led approach.

Local Development Companies deliver a large number of programmes including LEADER in rural areas. LEADER is a keystone in the bridge that continues to link rural enterprises and communities to the future of sustained economic and social development of rural areas as it has done over the last 30 years. Because of its pivotal role in Rural Society, it complements the delivery of Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP), Rural Social Scheme, Tús, Local Employment Services, Jobs Clubs, the Outdoor Recreation Programme, the Walks Scheme, Community Services Programme, Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, Social Farming, Ability, Social Prescribing and supports for Social Enterprises.

Each LDC is unique and with highly experienced and competent teams provide services that reflect the needs of their communities. Beyond the core programmes listed, LDCs also deliver national and European initiatives that enhance the development of their communities through enterprise, training, activation, education, health and community supports.

LDCs operate in rural, urban and island communities of all population profiles and densities supporting 173,000 individuals and over 15,000 community groups annually. Through social

inclusion work LDC's endeavour to reach out to all people who require extra support in the face of deprivation, unemployment, and exclusion.

ILDN as a representative body supports members through coherent policy development, research, HR support, networking, knowledge transfer, procurement, and Garda vetting. Increasingly ILDN is seen as the voice for volunteer-led, community-based LDCs who understand and service the needs of all our Communities across the Country. LDCs are fully accountable to all government and EU funders, through robust governance structures as well as rigorous audit and inspectorate regimes, including the CRO and the Charity Regulator.

Since its launch in 1991, the LEADER programme has helped rural communities across the European Union to actively engage and direct the local development of their areas, through community-led local development.

Ireland is widely regarded as the birthplace and flagbearer of LEADER for over three decades

### **What does a reduced LEADER Budget mean?**

The continued erosion of the LEADER Budget will:

- > Deprive rural communities of critical capacity building supports and funding for vital enterprise, tourism, and community-led development (more than 5,000 projects supported in the most recent Programme period). Weaker communities and particular groups will be left behind including our youth, women, older people as well as the many social enterprises which LEADER has been able to support to date.
- > Call into question the capacity to deliver on ambitions outlined in its National Rural Strategy – Our Rural Future which are specifically linked to the LEADER approach.
- > Hinder the Covid19 recovery in rural areas denying enterprises including farmers and farm families of critical funding opportunities and their ability to mitigate the effects of COVID19 and Brexit .
- > Inhibit the capacity of rural communities to deliver climate mitigation and biodiversity projects.

- > Curtail the delivery of complementary schemes such as PEACE, the Walks Scheme, the Rural Social Scheme, the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme. EIP and LIFE programmes etc.
- > Undermine the future viability of Ireland's rural based Local Development Companies.

### **Purpose of LEADER 2023-2027 (Draft CAP Strategic Plan)**

The aim of this intervention is to support a community led local development (CLLD) approach to rural development by funding initiatives that emerge at a local level that aim to address local challenges and needs. Ireland's SWOT analysis and Needs Assessment identified several challenges in rural Ireland for which the LEADER intervention can provide assistance. These include the need to support private enterprises to create rural jobs and communities to improve quality of life and economic activity in rural areas; and the need to create and sustain employment in rural Ireland with a focus on social inclusion and climate change mitigation. The LEADER Programme is a key rural development tool for supporting the economic and social development of rural communities, by providing the resources necessary for communities to support their own development and create capacity at local level.

The indicative high-level LEADER themes are as follows:

- Sustainable Development of Rural Environment and Climate Change Mitigation
- Economic Development and Job Creation
- Rural Infrastructure and Social Inclusion

## LEADER FUNDING 2007-2027

<b>Programming Period</b>	<b>Total Programme Allocation</b>	<b>Average Annual Allocation</b>
2007-2013 (delivered 2009-2013)	€425,000,000	€85,000,000
2014-2020 (delivered 2016 to 2020)	€250,000,000	€50,000,000
2021-2022 (Transitional)	€ 70,000,000 (plus exchequer funding as requested)	€35,000,000
2023-2027 (indicative budget)	€180,000,000	€36,000,000
<i>2023-2027 (Minimum Required)</i>	<i>€389,000,000</i>	<i>€77,800,000</i>

### LEADER 2023-2027 Indicative Allocation analysed

The EU budget agreement provided for a total CAP funding for Ireland of €7.5 billion over the 5 year period from 2023 to 2027. The funding is split between Pillar 1 (Direct Payments and Sectoral Interventions -€5.9billion) and Pillar II (Rural Development - €1.56billion). The allocation for the national exchequer to co-fund the Rural Development element of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) of €2.3bn has been agreed. This will bring the total funding for the CSP to €9.8bn and to €3.86bn in respect of the Rural Development component of the plan. Pillar II measures include LEADER interventions to be delivered by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Funding will be phased over the 2023-2027 period in line with the requirements of intervention design and the annual national budgetary process.

In accordance with Article 92(1) of the draft CAP Strategic Plan regulation, “At least 5% of the total EAFRD contribution to the CAP Strategic Plan as set out in Annex XI shall be reserved for LEADER. The maximum permissible Exchequer co-funding rate for the next LEADER programme will be 80%”.

The indicative €180m financial allocation for LEADER over the 2023-27 period will consist of €77.9m (43.28%) funding from European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) with the remainder funded by the National exchequer. This equates to 1.8% of Ireland's total CAP Budget.

Notwithstanding the increased national exchequer funding for the overall CAP Programme 2023 to 2027 there is a significant cut in LEADER funding for rural areas with the proposed allocation for the Programme falling from €425 million for the 2007-2013 Programme to just €180 million for the 2023-2027 programming period. Furthermore, the co-funding element of 56.72% falls well short of the 80% permissible under EU regulation. Increasing the co-funding rate to the maximum allowable rate affords the Government the opportunity to deliver a sustainable LEADER Budget of €389 million for the period 2023-2027.